

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Case File No.: AA-077729

AK-040-04-EA-019

Applicant: Bureau of Land Management
Anchorage Field Office

Type of
Action: Re-route of Revetment Road Trail off the Campbell Tract Airstrip, Alaska

Location: Campbell Tract Special Recreation Management Area; Seward Meridian,
T. 12 N., R. 3 W., Section 3, USGS topographic map Anchorage A-8.

Prepared By: Douglas Ballou, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Preparing
Office: Bureau of Land Management
Anchorage Field Office
6881 Abbott Loop Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99507

Date: May 2, 2004

I. INTRODUCTION:

The Campbell Tract (CT) is a 730 acre Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Administrative Site of natural, mostly wooded, public land located within the city limits of the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA). The primary purpose of the CT is to support the administrative functions and offices for the Anchorage Field Office (AFO) of the BLM. The CT is centered around the Campbell Airstrip, a 5,000' gravel runway dating to 1942, that is actively used by the AFO and other agencies for government purposes.

The CT is designated a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) and contains over 11 miles of multi-use, non-motorized trails that provide year-round recreational opportunities for approximately 40,000 area users. The CT is adjacent to, and managed in cooperation with, the 4,000-acre MOA Far North Bicentennial Park (FNBP), forming a contiguous piece of wilderness-like land linking the high mountains of Chugach State Park to the heart of Anchorage.

The one mile-long Revetment Road Trail (RRT) on CT follows the route of a World War II (WWII) bomber taxi-way through the woods east of the Campbell Airstrip. The trail departs from the north end of the Campbell Airstrip, roughly parallels the airstrip in a southwest direction, and ends by crossing the airstrip corridor directly opposite the AFO runway ramp. The RRT is designated as a dog sled trail, even though the trail crosses the airstrip, as the runway is closed during the snow season. The RRT is also heavily used in the non-snow months by recreationists. Currently, these users cross both the south and north portion of the active airstrip to enter or exit the RRT.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

Historically, recreational users have informally utilized the CT airstrip corridor for year-round recreation activities including walking, jogging, dog-walking, bicycling and skiing. Recreational use of the airstrip poses an unacceptable safety threat to both recreational users and operating aircraft. In order to eliminate this recreational use, the airstrip corridor has been signed as "off limits" and fences have been placed across common entry points. The purpose of this Proposed Action is to eliminate recreational traffic from the airstrip corridor by relocating the Revetment Road Trail at both ends of the runway.

B. Conformance With Land Use Plan:

The Proposed Action has been reviewed and is in compliance with the Southcentral Management Framework Plan (MFP), March 1980. Objective Number R-1 of the MFP states that BLM intends to "provide for hiking experiences". Objective R-4 states that BLM intends to "Provide for the needs of visitors seeking an experience through sightseeing, photography, observation and/or interpretation."

The Management Plan for Public Use and Resource Management on the Bureau of Land Management Campbell Tract Facility (June 1988) identifies the project area as part of the Dispersed Recreation Zone. The management objective for the Dispersed Recreation Zone is to allow and enhance non-motorized, dispersed recreation uses where compatible with administrative use of the airstrip, the communication sites, and access roads, and to allow new trail development as needed.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVE

A. Proposed Action:

The Proposed Action is to relocate both ends of the Revetment Road Trail off the CT airstrip and improve the trail to accessible standards. The Proposed Action also establishes trail connections to the existing accessible Moose Track and Coyote Trails to create a 3 mile accessible loop trail that begins and ends at the Smoke Jumper Trailhead near the entrance to the Campbell Tract Facility (CTF).

Three areas need to be improved to relocate the RRT from the airstrip and create the accessible loop. These sites are located at the south end of the airstrip, at the north end of the airstrip, and behind the Campbell Creek Science Center (CCSC) public parking lot.

The proposed RRT connection at the south end of the airstrip consists of an abandoned road corridor located .2 miles east of the airstrip that leads approximately .3 miles south and west to a terminus at Coyote Trail. This WWII era roadbed has become overgrown with low brush, alder, and limited ground cover. The Proposed Action reopens the abandoned corridor between the RRT and both Viewpoint and Coyote Trails to provide non-winter recreational users with safe passage around the airstrip.

The original road corridor was approximately 10-12 feet wide. The plan calls for reopening the corridor to a 10 foot width between Coyote Trail and the Viewpoint electronic site maintenance road to provide a maintenance vehicle access route to the electronic site that does not cross the airstrip. The balance of the RRT connection from the maintenance road north to the RRT requires re-opening the corridor to a 6 foot width and establishing a maximum trail tread width of 5-6 feet to match the character of the existing RRT. Approximately 90% of the corridor trail bed is well established and hardened and will require minimal work to establish a useable trail. The southernmost 250 feet of the corridor will require some scraping and filling with a Bobcat loader to build up the trail bed and establish a connection to Coyote Trail. Trees and vegetation in the corridor will be cut below ground level and overhead limbs in the corridor will be trimmed to a height of 12 feet to accommodate horse use. The trail will be improved to

accessible standards with level cross beds, 8% maximum slope, and a hardened and rolled trail bed surface. Gravel (3/4 minus) will be used in soft areas to improve accessibility features and facilitate drainage. Gravel will also be applied to existing portions of the RRT to bring the trail surface up to accessible standards as needed.

The RRT connection at the north end of the airstrip will require the construction of .15 miles of trail near the start of the Birch Knob Trail that will lead south to meet the RRT east of the airstrip. Existing portions of abandoned roads and social trails will be followed to accomplish the majority of this connection. Construction will involve removing vegetation and leveling the surface to the same standards as described above.

The third connection, located immediately west of the CCSC public parking lot, requires constructing a .1 mile trail link between Moose Track Trail and Old Rondy Trail. Currently, users must traverse the actual parking lot when connecting between these trails. Existing social trails, created by winter user traffic, will be taken advantage of as best as possible in creating this bypass route. The same accessible standards will be applied.

Social trails at the north end of the airstrip adjacent to the RRT corridor will be blocked with brush and re-vegetated to screen views of the airstrip and reduce opportunities for users to easily leave the new route. Social trails behind the CCSC will be obliterated and re-vegetated to encourage use of a single bypass route. Approximately 2 acres of the Viewpoint electronic site maintenance road between the airstrip and the new junction with RRT will also be re-vegetated.

Eight inch square sign poles will be installed at the Birch Knob, Viewpoint and Coyote Trail junctions to provide users with directional information. Permanent signs will be placed at the north and south end of the RRT prohibiting users from traveling the original trail portions leading to the airstrip. Gates and fence will be installed at the former airstrip crossings at both ends of the runway, and on the CCSC/airstrip access road just east of the Old Rondy Trail junction. During the snow months, when the trail reverts to dog sled use only, signs and barriers will inform multi-use users that the RRT portion of the 3.5 mile accessible loop is closed to non-dog sled traffic.

Trail work will be accomplished in the summers of 2004 and 2005 using BLM staff and volunteer resources. BLM staff will remove most of the corridor vegetation and perform all heavy equipment work. Volunteers will clean and level the trail surface, distribute gravel, and fine-tune the corridor with hand tools.

B. No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative is to leave the RRT as a designated winter-use dog sled trail and to continue the signing and education program to keep recreation users off the runway.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements:

The following Critical Elements are either not present or would not be adversely affected by the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative: Air Quality, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Environmental Justice, Farmlands (prime or unique), Floodplains, Native American Religious Concerns, Water Quality (Surface and Ground), Wetlands/Riparian Zones, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Wilderness.

1. Cultural Resources:

The CT contains scattered WWII remains dating from 1942 when a 5,000 foot military airstrip and support facilities were constructed to support nearby Ft. Richardson. War related improvements included an airstrip, taxiways, and revetments for aircraft use and various sod structures for housing and administrative functions including quarters, a kitchen and mess hall, latrines, and guard posts. These facilities were constructed from sod and locally available materials due to a shortage of building supplies and now appear as shallow pits and earth mounds covered with vegetation, and overgrown concrete foundations with occasional scattered boards and nails. Most of these cultural sites and remains lie off the north end of the existing Campbell Airstrip.

2. Threatened and Endangered Species:

No threatened or endangered species are known to be found on the CT.

3. Invasive, Non-Native Species:

There are 38 species of non-native plant species known to exist in Anchorage that are listed in the Alaska Exotic Plants Information Clearing House list. Several of these species likely occur in the identified trail relocation areas. These include Buckhorn Plantain *Plantago sp.*, Yellow Toadflax *Linaria vulgaris*, Blue Burr Stickweed *Lappula echinatat*, Annual Bluegrass *Poa annua*, Leafy Spurge *Euphorbia esula*, Tufted Vetch *Vicia cracca* and possibly other species. These species are generally found in disturbed areas and often colonize areas around roads and trails.

The Amber-marked Birch Leaf Miner *Profenusa thomsoni*, a small insect introduced from Europe, in the Anchorage area since the mid 1990's, has infected many of the birch trees in the entire Anchorage Bowl, including the CT. It causes defoliation of some trees and can kill trees that are weak or otherwise stressed.

4. Subsistence:

The CT lands are Federal Public Land as defined in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Section 810 and fall under the authority of the Federal Subsistence Board and the Subsistence Regulations for the Harvest of Fish and Wildlife on Federal Public Lands in Alaska. The CT lies within the Anchorage Management Unit of Game Management Unit 14C under which the current Subsistence Regulations noted above is closed to the taking of wildlife under both State (hunting and trapping) and Federal Subsistence Regulations. The taking of wildlife on the CT is further limited by Supplemental Rules issued on November 20, 1998 under 43 CFR 8365.1-6 that closed the CT to the use of firearms, archery equipment, traps, or snares. The CT has no documented consistent use by rural Alaskans of fish or game and no knowledge of such use has become available since the inception of the Federal Subsistence Program or the issuance of the noted Supplementary Rules.

5. Wastes, Hazardous and Solid:

There are no known hazardous or solid waste sites in the affected area.

B. Land Status:

CT is under the jurisdiction of the BLM by withdrawal for an administrative site directed by PLO 7471 which expires in 2022.

C. Recreation:

The CT is designated for non-motorized recreational use. Recreation management for the CT is directed by the June 1988 "A Management Plan for Public Use and Resource Management on the Bureau of Land Management Campbell Tract Facility". There are approximately 11 miles of developed recreation trails on CT. Some of these trails link to a wider trail system on the adjoining MOA FNB. The proximity of CT to urban Anchorage places high demands on the site from a variety of users. Most recreation occurs on trails that were developed on old tank roads and airplane taxiways.

Access for recreation use on CT is gained from two formal on-site trailheads and four trails entering from FNB. Established trailheads with parking include the

Smoke Jumper Trailhead located at the main CTF AFO complex entrance and the Campbell Airstrip Trailhead located at mile 1.1 on Campbell Airstrip Road. Trail maintenance, signing, and event permitting is a cooperative effort between the BLM, MOA Parks and Recreation Division, and various volunteers and user groups.

Recreation users are primarily residents of Anchorage and surrounding communities. Estimated 2003 visitation was 40,000 user days. Users are typically found walking, running, mountain biking, skiing, snowshoeing, dog mushing and horseback riding throughout the CT. Many users live close to CT and use the area regularly for exercise, often with their family dogs. Regular competitive events, often starting on FNNP lands traverse CT including the Nordic Ski Club's Tour of Anchorage and the World Sled Dog Championship Races.

D. Vegetation:

The CT contains a variety of habitats including spruce and birch forests, bogs, and riparian areas. Cottonwood and birch dating to the WWII era dominate the woodlands, interspersed with less mature white spruce, numbers of which have experienced high rates of recent beetle kill. The under-story is comprised of shrubs, forbs, lichens and moss above a ground cover of heavy organic litter.

E. Wildlife:

The CT contains a rich diversity of resident and non-resident wildlife. Resident species include moose, porcupine, mink, weasel, red squirrel, muskrat, beaver, snowshoe hare, voles, and shrews and at least 50 species of resident and non-resident birds including horned owl, northern saw-whet owl, boreal owl, northern goshawk, and spruce grouse. Non-resident species moving seasonally through CT to and from the Chugach Mountains to the east include grizzly bear and black bear, red fox, lynx and wolf. The South Fork of Campbell Creek traverses the northeast corner of CT. This stream supports populations of king and silver salmon, as well as rainbow trout, dolly varden, and spiny sculpin.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

1. Critical Elements:

a. Cultural Resources:

Reopening the RRT will not adversely affect WWII cultural resources at CT. The existing taxiway will be cleared of vegetation, but otherwise not altered. Maintaining a trail on this section of the old bomber taxiway will, in effect, help to preserve this part of Alaska's WWII history. Currently there are plans to

interpret the CT's WWII resources of which this trail is a part. The re-routed portions of the project will be inspected prior to ground disturbing activities and the new trail will avoid cultural resources should any be discovered.

b. Invasive, Non-Native Species:

Invasive, non-native plant species are known to occur on the project site and throughout the Anchorage Bowl. As vegetation is removed to re-establish trail corridors, the potential for an increase in invasive species would be higher. Invasive species would likely colonize areas along newly established trails and re-vegetated social trails. Fill materials and related transport equipment brought on site would have a high potential to bring in seeds from invasive or undesirable plant species.

c. Wastes, Hazardous & Solid:

Potential for harm to the environment is presented by risks associated with spills of fuel, oil and/or hazardous substances during operation of machinery in the construction area. Accidents and mechanical breakdown of machinery, or accidental spills while refueling chainsaws, the Bobcat loader, 4-wheeler ATV's, etc. are possible.

2. Recreation:

Users on CT are often seeking the solitude and quiet of the wooded CT to escape the noise and congestion of Anchorage. Increased levels of noise will be associated with brief intervals (4-5 days) of mechanized equipment use during construction. Portions of the original RRT may also be closed during periods of mechanized equipment use when transporting gravel to the work site and during major volunteer trail work events including National Trails Day and National Public Lands Day. The RRT is not currently a designated multi-use trail, nor serves as a main connecting network route, therefore temporary closure during construction should not inconvenience most CT users. Opportunities to view wildlife may be decreased during construction due to noise, machinery, and increased human presence.

3. Vegetation:

Approximately 15-40 years of secondary growth consisting of mostly alder, scrub and ground cover vegetation will be removed from the 6' trail corridor. Some alder will be cut outside of the 6' corridor when found leaning into the trail footprint. Small amounts of secondary growth birch

and white spruce will be removed if found growing directly in the selected trail corridor. Trees and brush will be removed with mechanized equipment, chainsaws, handsaws, and pruners, as needed, and dragged at least 50 feet off the corridor into the surrounding woods. Ground vegetation along the trail corridor may be trampled by vegetation removal activities, but should return before the end of the growing season and be well established along the trail by the next year.

4. Wildlife:

Construction events may have short-term impacts on CT wildlife in the immediate area of the trail corridor and approach routes, temporarily driving species away from areas of increased human activity. Minimal habitat will be destroyed as the relocation routes generally follow existing social trails and historic road corridors. Moose and bear may be encountered during trail construction operations and are potentially dangerous.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

The effects of current management practices and user patterns on CT will continue unchanged. Many users will continue to use the airstrip as a means of transiting the CT in a north/south direction, and other users will continue to enter and exit the RRT by crossing the airstrip near the AFO. The RRT will likely receive less non-snow season use due to the signs prohibiting recreational use of the airstrip. Moose Track Trail and Viewpoint Trail will serve as the main non-airstrip north/south recreation routes. Mobility impaired users following Moose Track Trail will not have access to the east side of CT. Winter dog sled use will continue unchanged.

C. Cumulative Impacts:

CT as a wilderness-like recreation area is under siege from every direction. Housing developments press against the western boundary of CT and closely follow the southern boundary of adjacent FNB. Numerous social trails can be followed onto CT from these neighborhoods. The population of Anchorage is growing exponentially and the MOA is establishing a new sports park consisting of ball fields and a 200 vehicle parking lot adjacent to the southeast corner of CT off Abbott Loop Road. A major established trailhead also departs from this new parking lot, leading onto CT from the south. Both a planned MOA roadway expansion of Abbott Loop Road and a proposed 48" diameter waterline installation project adjacent to the west boundary of CT are certain to increase awareness and visibility of CT. All of these influences will lead to increased use and recreation pressure on area park lands in general and CT in particular. Increased trail wear, forest impacts, and wildlife disturbance are obvious

outcomes of this heavier use. User experience and perception of solitude may also be modified by increases in user traffic and noise associated with vehicle traffic and ball field activities. To handle this increase in year-round user traffic and preserve the natural character of CT, it will be important to provide well marked, hardened trails that provide good connectivity to the trail network, while discouraging further social trailing and casual airstrip use.

Implementation of the Proposed Action will result in a positive effect on the cumulative impacts facing CT by providing a significantly larger area of re-vegetated land than will be removed from CT by the trail relocation activities. Approximately 2 acres of road bed and social trails will be re-vegetated. A second positive effect of the Proposed Action will be the reduction of additional social trailing caused by users detouring around runway barriers to access the airstrip for recreation purposes. The relocated portions of the RRT at both end of the airstrip will provide easily accessible and viable connections to the greater trail network that should discourage the majority of CT users from traversing the airstrip.

D. Mitigation Measures:

1. Invasive, Non-Native Species:

Clearing and soil disturbance should be minimized where practicable to limit opportunities for invasive, non-native species to become established. Topsoil or fill material brought on site should be free of invasive, non-native species. Re-vegetation should be performed using only native species and seed certified free of noxious weeds. During and following construction, disturbed areas should be monitored for invasive, non-native species and eradicated by hand or mechanical means.

2. Waste, Hazardous and Solid:

To prevent spills, refueling should be performed only at designated locations where the project manager has established adequate spill containment and appropriate spill response materials. Spill kits should also be either carried by vehicles or positioned close to where they are being operated to facilitate rapid response to a release during operation. A large plastic tub/tray can be used as the refueling point for chainsaws at the point of operation. Vehicles should be brought to the CTF fuel pad for refueling. Operators of machinery should be properly trained for spill response, at a minimum the HAZWOPER First Responder Operations level (29 CFR 1910.120(q)(6)(ii)). Accidental releases outside of a containment area should be reported immediately to CTF Management. First Responders should perform initial emergency response actions,

contractors will be called in by CTF Management to perform detailed cleanup operations.

3. Recreation:

All efforts should be made to perform heavy equipment use on Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:00 A.M. and 4:00 P.M. to reduce impacts on users during the traditional heavy use periods of evenings and weekends. Signs will be posted at Coyote Trail, Viewpoint Trail, and Birch Knob Trail warning users of trail construction dangers and the closure of the RRT route.

4. Vegetation:

Individual trees to be removed should be marked to prevent unnecessary destruction of trees outside the trail corridor. Minor adjustments to the route should be made to preserve healthy white birch and white spruce as much as practical. Re-vegetation will be performed with native grass mix, white spruce seedlings, and white birch seedlings with protective cages.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. Persons and Agencies Consulted:

Susan Wagnon, Alaska Sled Dog Racing Association
John McCleary, MOA Parks and Recreation Division
Ned Darling, BLM Facilities Manager

B. List of Preparers:

Larry Beck, Environmental Protection Specialist
Douglas Ballou, Lead Preparer
Donna Redding, Archeologist
Mike Zaidlicz, Forester/Iditarod Trails Coordinator
Bruce Seppi, Wildlife Biologist
Jeff Denton, Subsistence Specialist
Larry Beck, Environmental Protection Specialist